

DR. NELSON'S LECTURE

ON SLAVERY.

Dr. Nelson was born and educated in Tennessee. For many years he was a surgeon; but having become very deeply impressed with religion, he changed that profession for the ministry; and at length became pastor of a Presbyterian Church, in Danville, Kentucky. His labors there were much blessed; and all classes of people in that region speak of him as having been singularly beloved and respected, until he thought duty called him to become the president of Marion College, in Missouri. Here his able letters on the subject of slavery aroused jealous fears as to the College; and the arrival of two free colored youths, from New-York, one to be employed as a domestic in Dr. Nelson's family, and the other with the intention of fitting himself for a missionary to Africa, served as a breeze to the already kindling flame. Two hundred men, including lawyers, doctors, and various public characters, armed with pistols, dirks, clubs, &c. proceeded to the Mission Farms, with the avowed intention of

white young men, in whose company the colored youths had arrived; searched their trunks for what they called "incendiary papers;" threatened tar and feathers, or 150 lashes, well laid on: but finally released them, without personal violence, on condition that they left the state forthwith, and never entered it again, under penalty of death. The innocent colored youths, in the mean time, had been secretly conveyed away, and thus escaped the danger.

This outbreak was followed by fresh disturbances of a similar character; in which Dr. Nelson was threatened and distressed, but otherwise received no injury. A public meeting was called at Palmyra, in which resolutions were passed, approving of these violent proceedings, and declaring "a solemn and abiding determination" to follow them up, till fanaticism was crushed. This meeting, in May, 1836, was followed by events which greatly harrassed Dr. Nelson, and many of his friends considered his life in danger. On one occasion, he was obliged to escape from his home at night to avoid the fury of Lynch law. The spirit of slavery, finally drove him from Missouri. He is now zealously engaged in building up a Mission Institute in the neighborhood of Quincy, Illinois. During a visit to New England in February, 1839, to solicit funds for this institution, Dr.

Nelson, being requested publicly to express his sentiments concerning slavery, delivered the following Lecture at Northampton, Mass.

THE LECTURE.*

Dr. Nelson commenced his remarks by stating, that the black and white races were mixing very fast in the slave States. He had been accustomed to hear young men boast so generally of profligate connexions with slaves, that when he was first told such attachments would be disgraceful in the free States, he could not believe it. The gradual lightening of complexions among the slaves was strikingly observable, even within his own recollection. He knew people, married and settled in the free States, who had once been slaves; but they were so perfectly white, that none suspected their origin. He said when he was surgeon in the army, during the last war, an officer, who messed with him, one day stepped up to the ranks, and laying his hand on a soldier, said, 'You are my slave!' The man dropped his knapsack and musket in a moment, and cooked for them during the remainder of the campaign. He was lighter than his master, who happened to have

* The sketch of this lecture was first published in the Boston Liberator, March 1, 1839. It, has been revised, and some slight addition made, by Mrs. Child.

a dark complexion. His astonished comrades would exclaim, 'Why, Julius, is it possible you are a slave? You used to be a very respectable and thriving man in Ohio!' To which the 'chattel' replied, 'And I mean to be respectable and thriving again, before I die. Honesty and industry will help a man up in the world.' When his master urged that he ought to serve him several years, in consideration of his kindness, and the money he had paid for him, Julius answered, 'Perhaps I may for a little while, master; but I can't stay long; freedom is too sweet.' Dr. N. mentioned having talked with a slave, who said he had run away in obedience to his master's orders. 'My master was always very kind to me,' said he; 'and when my mistress was first married, she was very kind; but as her children grew up, the neighbors observed they looked just like me. Then she began to dislike me, and had me punished often. But the older the children grew, the more we looked alike. At last, she said I must be sold to New Orleans. Then my master told me to tie up my clothes and run away.'

The inferences deduced from these facts were, that slavery tended to promote a rapid amalgamation, while freedom checked it; and that if the admixture of the two races went on in as rapid a ratio as it had done for

the last thirty years, it would soon be impossible for us to judge whether our citizens were slaves or not, by their complexion.

The speaker next alluded to the strong local attachments of the colored race. He had frequently met emancipated or runaway slaves, who said, 'How I do long to go back where I lived when I was a child! The climate suits me better; and more than that, all my friends and relations are there. Oh, if slavery was only abolished, so that we could all be free there, I'd be back quicker than I came.'

This was intended to show that there was no danger of colored people all flocking to the North, in case of emancipation, and leaving the South without laborers.

Dr. N. expressed surprise that he had been asked to lecture in New England, because he knew so much about slavery. "Why, my dear friends," said he, "there are things which the smallest boy in this room knows just as well, perhaps better than I can tell him. A dear sister in Christ lately asked me, if I did not think the slaves would cut their masters' throats, if they were freed at once. Said I, Dear sister, you shall answer that question yourself, if you please. Suppose you were compelled to work without wages, year after year—told when you might go to bed, and when you must get up—what you

might eat, and what you might wear—should you think it just and right? Suppose your master at last became troubled in conscience, and said, 'I restore your freedom. Forgive the wrong I have done you. Go, or stay, as you please. Your earnings are henceforth your own. If you are in trouble, come to me, and I will be your friend.' Do you think you should feel like cutting that man's throat? She eagerly replied, 'Oh, no, indeed I should not.'

"Although labor is a blessing to man, yet we all feel that a great degree of it is hard. When I plough the fields in a hot day, I feel that there is some things *hard* about it. What is it enables me to go through it with a light heart? It is the hope of receiving wages, for the comfort and improvement of myself and family. But what if I and my family are all compelled to work without wages? This would make the labor seem ten times as hard. My dear fellow travellers to eternity, these things must be just as plain to you, as they are to me.

"I lived many years without having a suspicion that there was any thing wrong in holding slaves. Even after I had an interest in Christ, there seemed to be nothing amiss in it; just as pious people went on making and selling rum, without troubling their consciences about it. Oh, that I then could have had

faithful christian brethren, to rouse me with the voice of exhortation and rebuke ! I should not then have approached the table of our Lord with fingers all dripping with the blood of souls ! I will tell you what first called my attention to this subject. My wife came to me one day, and said that Sylvia (one of our servants) had told her we had no right to hold our fellow-beings in bondage ; she had worked for us six years, and she thought she had fully paid for herself. I gave some rough answer, and turned away. A few days after, my wife again remarked that Sylvia said the holding of slaves could not be justified by the Bible. ' Don't mind her nonsense,' said I. By and bye, my wife said, ' Sylvia brings arguments from the Scriptures, which I find it hard to answer.' Well, my friends, the end of it was, that Sylvia made an abolitionist of my wife, and my wife made an abolitionist of me.

" When my feelings were thus roused on the subject, I was anxious to discover some way by which we could benefit the colored race, and best atone for the wrong we had done them. I thought I discovered this in the Colonization plan : and for seven or eight years I labored in that cause with as much zeal as I ever felt on any subject. If you ask why I did not, during this time, boldly remonstrate with others against the sin of slavery, I must answer, that, in addition to the natural

depravity of my own heart, I was prevented by the conviction that I was doing enough of my duty by working for Colonization. After a time my views began to change. I will tell you briefly how it happened. If you differ from me in the inferences I draw, I have no controversy with you, my brother. Work in your own way, I only tell you what effected a change in my own mind. I had from the very beginning been occasionally pained by remarks I heard. When I recommended the scheme to slaveholders, they entered into it warmly, and said they should be right glad to get rid of the free colored people; they were convinced such a movement would render their slave property more valuable and secure. These things pained me a little. Still I thought I might do good by laboring for Colonization; and I did labor zealously, until the discussion at the North forced upon me the knowledge that the Society has been working *sixteen years* to carry off *one fortnight's increase of slaves*! Then I was "discouraged; and my hands dropped by my side." A visit to the Cherokees gave me some thoughts concerning Colonization as a Missionary enterprise. Many of the Indians had become converts to Christ; they had improved in the arts of civilized life; and there was a light in the eye, always kindled when men begin to think about the soul and its existence in a future

life. But the difficulty was, the same country which sent them messengers of the blessed Gospel, likewise sent among them cart-loads of rum. I remembered how missionaries in Pagan lands dreaded the arrival of a ship from their own country ; because where there was one sailor that would speak to the natives of God and the Bible, there were six who would lead them into drunkenness and debauchery. Why, my dear hearers, I should be afraid to take any congregation, in the most moral town—even this audience, if you please,—and set you all down in the midst of a heathen land, as missionaries there. I should be afraid you would not all be fit for your work.”

The lecturer neglected to point the moral ; but he obviously meant to ask, What then can be expected from ship-loads of ignorant and degraded slaves, landed on a Pagan shore ?

“ After I emancipated all my other slaves,” continued he, “ I still held one man in bondage several years. He seemed to be incapable of taking care of himself. My friend said it would be wrong to emancipate him ; he was so stupid, he would suffer if he had no master to provide for him, and would soon come upon the county. He certainly did seem very stupid ; so I continued to hold him as a slave. But oh, how I bless God that a voice of warning and rebuke reached me

from the Free States! Oh! I expect to sing about it through all eternity! It led me to ask myself, are you not deceived in thinking you keep this man from motives of benevolence? Is it not the fact that you like well enough to have him to black your boots, and catch your horse? I called him to me, and said 'I give you your freedom. Whatever you earn is your own. If you get sick, or poor, come to me. My house shall always be a home to you.' About a year after, I met him riding on a pony. 'Well,' said I, 'how do you like freedom?' 'Oh, massa, the sweetest thing in all the world! I've got a hundred silver dollars stowed away in a box!' The last time I talked with him, he had laid by six hundred dollars. If you let a man have the management of his own concerns, though he is stupid, he will brighten up a little.

"When I was three or four years old, I could say off all the alphabet, and spell some small words; but it was soon discovered that I had learnt all this by rote, and did not know one of the letters by sight. I was taken from school, and one of my father's young slaves became my principal teacher. He would lead me out under a shady tree, and try to impress the letters on my mind, by saying, 'That's great O, like the horse-collar; that's H, like the garden gate, that's little g, like your father's spectacles.' He was much brighter

than I was ; but I was sent to college, and he was sent into the cornfield. He became dull ; and I dare say if I could now find him, somewhere in Alabama, I should find him stupid and ignorant. Yet if he had gone to school and college along side of me, he would have been as much superior to me, as I am now superior to him.

“I have been asked concerning the religious instruction of slaves ; and I feel safe in answering, that in general it amounts to little or nothing. Hundreds and thousands never heard of a Savior ; and of those who are familiar with his name, few have any comprehension of its meaning. I remember one gray headed negro, with whom I tried to talk concerning his immortal soul. I pointed to the hills, and told him God made them. He said he did not believe any body made the hills. I asked another slave about Jesus Christ. I found he had heard his name, but thought he was son of the Governor of Kentucky.”

(Dr. Nelson was understood to say this slave was held by a Minister of the Gospel.)

“One of my pious Presbyterian brothers charged me with being too severe upon him: He said he certainly did instruct his people: he did not suffer them to grow up in heathen ignorance. While we were talking, one of his slaves entered the room ; and, having asked leave to propose some questions to him, I

said, 'Can you tell me how many Gods there are?' 'Oh, yes, massa; there are two Gods.' "

Being asked concerning the treatment of slaves, Dr. N. said, "I have not attempted to harrow your feelings with stories of cruelty. I will, however, mention one or two among the many incidents that came under my observation as family physician. I was one day dressing a blister, and the mistress of the house sent a little black girl into the kitchen to bring me some warm water. She probably mistook her message; for she returned with a bowl full of boiling water; which her mistress no sooner perceived, than she thrust her hand into it, and held it there till it was half cooked.

"I remember a young lady who played well on the piano, and was ready to weep over any fictitious tale of suffering. I was present when one of her slaves lay on the floor in a high fever, and we feared she might not recover. I saw that young lady stamp upon her with her feet; and the only remark her mother made, was, 'I am afraid Evelina is *too much* prejudiced against poor Mary.'

"My hearers, you must not form too harsh a judgment concerning individuals who give way to such bursts of passion. None of you can calculate what would be the effects on your own temper, if you were long accustomed to arbitrary power, and hourly vexed

with slovenly, lazy, and disobedient slaves. If sent on an errand, they would be sure to let the cattle into the cornfield; if they gave the horse his oats, they would be sure to leave the peck measure where it would be kicked to pieces. Such is the irritating nature of slave service.

"I am asked whether Anti-Slavery does not tend to put back emancipation. Perhaps there is less said about it in Kentucky, than there was a few years ago; but the quietus seems to be this: in answer to my arguments, slaveholders reply. 'Why, Christian ministers and members of churches, at the north, say *they* do not think slavery is so entirely wrong. Now, they certainly have a better chance to form an impartial judgment than we have.' This operates like a dose of laudanum to the conscience; but the effects are daily growing weaker. I do not know how it is, but there seems to be a class at the North, much more ready to apologize for slavery, than the majority of the slaveholders themselves.

"Much is said about the excitement produced.—For the sake of the little boys here, I will illustrate this by an example. The Greeks were a cultivated and refined people; but it was a part of their worship of Diana to whip boys at her altar, until their sides were worn so thin, they could see their bowels;

and their parents were not permitted to weep, while they witnessed this cruel operation.-- When the apostle Paul came among them, he lifted up his voice against their Pagan rites, and told them their Gods were made by the hands of men. Then they all began to scream, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!' Some good people hearing the uproar, might have said, 'See how Paul puts back the cause of Christianity! None of the other apostles will dare to come here to preach. Paul himself had to run!' Yet what was the result? The images of Diana were finally overthrown, and Christ was worshipped in her stead. Just so it will be with the slaveholders. They scream, because they feel the sharp points of truth prick their consciences; but they can't stand there and scream forever. The postmasters may try to shut out information; but it is like piling up a bar of sand across a rushing river. Let the broad stream roll on, and it will soon carry the sand before it.

"I am glad of organized abolition, because I believe that over all the din, some portion of truth even now reaches the slaveholder's conscience. Already, many have learned that every thing is safe and prosperous in the British West Indies, and that property is fast rising in value there; more will learn it soon. I hear of one acquaintance after

another, who begins to feel uneasy about holding human beings in bondage. Members of my former church in Kentucky beg me to print more letters about slavery; and when I tell them the postmaster will destroy them, they answer, 'Then seal them up in the form of letters; we are willing to pay the postage.' Already it is observable that professors of religion are afraid to *sell* their slaves. This shows that the wedge has entered. It will enter deeper yet.

"Am I asked what is the remedy for slavery?—I can only answer, that I have known very many emancipated slaves; and I have never known or heard of one instance where freedom did not make them more intelligent, industrious, and faithful to their employers. Their grateful affection for old master and mistress almost amounts to worship. They seem ready to kiss the very ground they tread on. The plan I propose is, that each and every slaveholder try this blessed experiment. But some inquire, ought they not to be compensated for their property? Sylvia said she had paid all she cost me, when she had worked for us six years; and she said truly. Now a large proportion of slaves have been held three and four times as long; and of course have paid for themselves three or four times over.

"What is the duty of christians at the

North? Dear fellow travellers to eternity, need I remind you that Jesus has said, inasmuch as we neglect the least of his brethren, we neglect him? Jesus is the Brother, as well as the Redeemer, of the human race. If you neglect the poor slave, when he lies in prison, sick, hungry, and naked, how will you answer for it at the judgment seat? Surely it is a solemn duty for christians at the North to rebuke and persuade christians at the South, with all affection, but still with all faithfulness and perseverance.

"I have stated only what I myself have seen and known, in Kentucky, Missouri, Virginia, and Tennessee. To illustrate each point, I have selected one or two instances where I might relate a thousand. If any man doubts my evidence, I think I could convince him of its truth if he would travel with me in the states where I have resided."

This is a hasty abstract of Dr. Nelson's lecture; but I believe it is correct. The audience apparently listened with a great degree of interest. These anecdotes of things personally known to the lecturer are excellent illustrations of principles, and are highly attractive. I have often wished that James G. Birney and Angelina E. Grimke made more free use of them.